

Message Text

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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 4 ADDIS ABABA 1399

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, ET
SUBJ: PROSPECTS FOR ERITREA

SUMMARY AND COMMENT: WITH OGADEN CONFLICT WINDING DOWN
AND SHIFTING FROM WARFARE TO REHABILITATION, IT IS CER-
TAIN THAT PROVISIONAL MILITARY ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL
(PMAC OR DIRG) WILL TURN ITS FULL ATTENTION TO ERITREA.

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ETHIOPIA'S REDIRECTION TOWARD RESOLUTION OF ERITREAN
PROBLEM WILL FOCUS INTERNATIONAL CONCERN ON FATE OF ERI-
TREAN POPULATION AND ON STRATEGIC VALUE OF ETHIOPIA'S
RED SEA COASTLINE. DEVELOPMENTS THERE WILL PLACE IN-
CREASING PRESSURE ON USG TO FORMULATE A POLICY WHICH
BALANCES THE COMPETING INTERESTS IN AREA, OR AT LEAST
TO TAKE MORE FORTHRIGHT STAND THAN CURRENT VAGUE POSI-

TION IN SUPPORT OF UNSPECIFIED NEGOTIATED SOLUTION OF PROBLEM. CARDINAL AFRICAN PRINCIPLE OF TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY WILL AGAIN BE BASIS OF DIRG POLICY TOWARD ERITREA AS IT WAS IN OGADEN, AND WILL BE JUSTIFICATION FOR FUTURE ACTIONS. LACK OF WILLINGNESS ON PART OF BOTH ETHIOPIANS AND ERITREANS TO NEGOTIATE SUBSTANTIVELY WITH EACH OTHER APPEARS TO DICTATE A MILITARY, RATHER THAN POLITICAL OR NEGOTIATED SOLUTION TO PROBLEM. MILITARY SITUATION FOR EPMG IN ERITREA HAS STABILIZED SOMEWHAT OVER PAST SIX WEEKS, IN SPITE OF HEAVY ETHIOPIAN COMMITMENTS ON OGADEN FRONT, AND IN SOME CASES HAS IMPROVED. CONTINUING INABILITY OF VARIOUS ERITREAN GROUPS TO REACH UNIFICATION, POSSIBILITY OF DECREASED ARMS SUPPLIES, AND FAILURE TO CAPTURE ANY MORE MAJOR STRATEGIC TOWNS HELD BY ETHIOPIANS SINCE KEREN FELL IN AUG 77 DO NOT AUGUR WELL FOR FUTURE OF ERITREAN SECESSIONISTS. WITH THESE PROSPECTS IN MIND, EMBASSY BELIEVES FUTURE USG POLICY MIGHT INCLUDE FOLLOWING ASPECTS: CRITICISM OF FOREIGN TROOP INVOLVEMENT IN INTERNAL ETHIOPIAN AFFAIR, WITH EYE TOWARD GAINING SUPPORT OF AFRICANS, PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AGAINST CIVILIAN POPULATION, SUPPORT FOR ETHIOPIA'S TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY, AND PRIVATE CONSULTATIONS WITH SOVIETS AND CUBANS AS TO POLITICAL COSTS OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN ERITREA.

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END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

1. ALTHOUGH OGADEN FIGHTING IS APPARENTLY OVER FOR PRESENT, SITUATION IN HORN WILL CONTINUE TO BE VOLATILE AND SOMEWHAT UNSTABLE. ONE MAJOR SOURCE OF INSTABILITY WILL BE SHIFT OF DIRG ATTENTION TO ERITREA AND ALMOST CERTAIN LIKELIHOOD OF FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT. EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT, HAVING SUCCEEDED IN OGADEN USING METHODOICAL SOVIET STRATEGY AND COMMAND LOGISTICS, EPMG COUNTS ON USING SIMILAR TACTICS FOR ERITREA, NOTWITHSTANDING MORE FORMIDABLE CHALLENGE OF GUERILLA WAR, BACKED ALMOST TO A MAN BY ERITREAN POPULATION. FRENCH MILATT, WHO HAS BEEN FAIRLY RELIABLE IN PREDICTING ETHIOPIAN MILITARY INTENTIONS IN PAST, STATED THAT HE BELIEVES ETHIOPIANS ARE COMMITTED TO GRADUAL BUILDUP OF FORCES IN ERITREA LEADING TO INTENSIFIED MILITARY CAMPAIGN AGAINST SECESSIONISTS. PUBLIC MESSAGE FROM NORTHERN FRONT FORCES TO EASTERN AND SOUTHERN FORCES AFTER SOMALI WITHDRAWAL ALSO INDICATES COMMITMENT TO MILITARY SOLUTION. "WE PLEDGE AND DECLARE WE WILL AT ANY COST EMANCIPATE OPPRESSED NATIONALITIES IN ERITREA...AND MAKE OUR COMRADES ON EASTERN FRONT

HAPPY WITH GLORIOUS VICTORY OVER THE PUPPETS OF DECA-
DENT ARAB REGIMES AND IMPERIALISM."

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2. DESPITE PUBLIC ASSURANCES BY CUBAN VP RODRIGUEZ
THAT CUBAN FORCES WILL NOT BE USED TO SOLVE INTERNAL
ETHIOPIAN PROBLEM, IT IS ALMOST CERTAIN THAT SOVIETS
WILL BEND TO ETHIOPIAN PRESSURES TO "ASSIST" IN SOLV-
ING ERITREAN PROBLEMS, EVEN IF RELUCTANTLY. SOME SUS-
PICIONS ABOUT SOVIET MOTIVES AND INTENTIONS PERSIST
AMONG ETHIOPIANS BECAUSE OF SOVIET ASSURANCES LAST
YEAR THAT SOMALIS WOULD NOT INVADE. RESIDENT SOVIET
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AMB ASSERTED AS LATE AS DEC 77 THAT ETHIOPIAN DISTRUST OF SOVIETS HAD NOT YET BEEN DISSIPATED, AND THIS HAMPERED SOVIET ABILITY TO INFLUENCE ETHIOPIANS TO DIVERGE FROM LATTER'S PERCEIVED INTERESTS. WE THEREFORE BELIEVE SOVIETS ARE LIKELY TO "PERSUADE" CUBANS TO COOPERATE WITH ETHIOPIANS IN ERITREA IN AN EFFORT TO MAINTAIN AND BUILD CONFIDENCE OF DIRG TOWARD THEMSELVES IN SHORT TERM. FRENCH MILATT HAS SPECULATED THAT CUBANS AND SOVIETS WILL BECOME DEEPLY INVOLVED IN ERITREA, ALSO NOTING THAT IT WILL BE WITH SOME RELUCTANCE.

3. DIRG HAS TAKEN VARIOUS RECENT DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVES TO NEUTRALIZE SUPPORT FOR ERITREAN CAUSE AMONG LATTER'S TRADITIONAL MILITARY SUPPLIERS. ALGERIAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN MOHAMMED MESSAOUD KELLOU VISITED ADDIS ABABA MAR 6 WITH SPECIAL MESSAGE FROM PRES. BOUMEDIENNE, FOLLOWING PREVIOUS VISIT TO ALGERIA BY DIRG STANDING COMMITTEE MEMBER. LOCAL MEDIA REPORTS INDICATED AT THE TIME THAT ALGERIA WAS PREPARED TO SUPPORT ETHIOPIAN GOVT (EPMG) IF IT WOULD IN TURN BACK ALGERIAN POSITION ON WESTERN SAHARA. KEY ISSUE IN ERITREA AND WESTERN SAHARA IN ETHIO-ALGERIAN VIEW IS OAU PRINCIPLE OF TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY UPON WHICH THERE IS BASIS FOR MUTUALLY-BENEFICIAL TRADE-OFF.

4. ETHIOPIA'S FLIRTATION WITH LIBYA OVER PAST YEAR ORIGINALLY APPEARED TO BE DESIGNED TO TRADE OFF LIBYAN FINANCIAL AND MILITARY MATERIEL SUPPORT FOR ETHIOPIAN SUPPORT AGAINST SUDAN'S NIMEIRI. IT WAS ALSO EXPECTED BY ETHIOPIANS THAT PART OF TRADE-OFF WOULD BE WITHHOLDING OF LIBYAN SUPPORT TO ERITREANS. HOWEVER,

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LIBYA'S GROWING RAPPROCHMENT WITH SUDAN, HER FAILURE TO PROVIDE KIND OF CASH EPMG HOPED FOR, HER APPARENT SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT ERITREA, AND HER OBVIOUS DILEMMA OVER HOW TO TAKE SIDES IN OGADEN WAR HAVE ALL SERVED TO TEMPER BILATERAL FRIENDSHIP WHICH WAS DEVELOPING RAPIDLY LAST YEAR AND TO CAUSE ETHIOPIA SERIOUSLY TO QUESTION LIBYAN INTENTIONS. ETHIOPIANS REMAIN WARY THAT COL. QADHAFI MAY YET AGAIN SWITCH TO SUPPORT OF ERITREANS, DESPITE SOVIET REPRESENTATIONS ON BEHALF OF ETHIOPIANS.

5. IMMINENT OPENING OF PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZA-

TION (PLO) OFFICE IN ADDIS ABABA IS ANOTHER ASPECT OF DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS TO DIMINISH SUPPORT TO ERITREANS. HOWEVER, EVENTS IN SOUTHERN LEBANON MAY OF THEMSELVES VIRTUALLY ELIMINATE ANY SIGNIFICANT PLO MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO ERITREANS FOR AT LEAST COMING YEAR. THERE ARE ALSO REPORTS OF STRONG SOVIET PRESSURE ON BOTH SYRIANS AND IRAQIS TO HALT ASSISTANCE THEY HAVE PROVIDED ERITREANS IN PAST, WHICH MAY BE HAVING SOME IMPACT. PREVIOUS CUBAN AND SOUTH YEMEN (PDRY) SUPPORT TO ERITREANS NATURALLY HAS CEASED COMPLETELY, AND PDRY COMBAT ROLE ON EPMG SIDE HAS BEEN DOCUMENTED FREQUENTLY IN RECENT MONTHS. SUDAN HAS LONG SINCE DROPPED KIND OF REFERENCES NIMEIRI WAS MAKING LAST YEAR ABOUT AN INDEPENDENT ERITREA AND IS EVEN REPORTEDLY ON VERGE OF THREATENING TO CLOSE ITS TERRITORY TO ERITREANS AS TRANSIT POINT FOR SUPPLIES IN ORDER TO FORCE NEGOTIATIONS WITH EPMG. EGYPT, TOO, REPORTEDLY HAS RECONSIDERED IMPLICATIONS OF INDEPENDENT ERITREA IN CONTEXT OF OTHER AFRICAN INTERESTS AND RECOGNITION THAT MILITANT MARXIST-LENINIST STATE ALONG RED SEA SEEMS INEVITABLE, NO MATTER WHAT IS FINAL OUTCOME OF INSURGENCY.

6. AWARE THAT TRADITIONAL MILITARY SUPPLIERS ARE BE-
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COMING INCREASINGLY RELUCTANT TO PROVIDE MILITARY ASSISTANCE, ERITREANS HAVE TURNED TO CONSERVATIVE ARAB COUNTRIES MOST STRONGLY OPPOSED TO MENGISTU AND TO SOVIET/CUBAN INVOLVEMENT, WHO COINCIDENTALLY ARE PERCEIVED AS CLOSE COLLABORATORS OF US. SAME ACCUSATIONS RAISED AGAINST SAUDIS, OMANIS, PAKISTANIS, IRANIANS, EGYPTIANS, AND EVEN JORDANIANS IN OGADEN CONFLICT MAY BE VOICED AGAIN IN ERITREA. SOVIETS AND THEIR ALLIES CAN BE EXPECTED TO CO-OPERATE BY LOCKING ETHIOPIA MORE FIRMLY WITHIN RANKS OF ITS "RADICAL" THIRD WORLD ALLIES.

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7. AS WAR SITUATION INTENSIFIES IN ERITREA, ERITREAN
PROPAGANDA MILL IS LIKELY TO HIGHLIGHT INTERNATIONALIZA-
TION OF CONFLICT, AS WELL AS "GENOCIDAL" ATROCITIES
AGAINST CIVILIAN POPULATION. VOCAL ERITREAN LOBBIES
IN US, UK, FRG, SWEDEN, FRANCE AND CANADA COULD HAVE
SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON PUBLIC OPINION SIMILAR TO THAT
DURING NIGERIAN (BIAFRA) CIVIL WAR. PRESSURE ON THESE
GOVTS TO "DO SOMETHING" TO PREVENT GROSS HUMAN
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RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND TO FORCE "FOREIGN ADVISORS" TO
LEAVE ERITREA WILL BE MUCH GREATER THAN IN OGADEN.
AFTER ALL, NO OUTSIDE AGGRESSION IS INVOLVED. ETHIO-
PIAN CASE FOR EXTERNAL INTERFERENCE IN INTERNAL AFFAIR
IF ISSUE EVER REACHES UN, IS NOT PARTICULARLY STRONG,
GIVEN QUESTIONABLE LEGALITY OF HER ACTION IN ABOLISH-
ING FEDERATED STATUS IN 1962. GROWING PROSPECT THAT
EPMG WILL SUCCEED IN ASSERTING FULL CONTROL OVER ALL
OF ETHIOPIAN TERRITORY, THANKS TO SOVIET AND CUBAN
ASSISTANCE, WILL AROUSE WIDESPREAD APPREHENSION AMONG
MID-EAST COUNTRIES.

8. USG ESPECIALLY MAY BE SORELY PRESSED TO BALANCE

HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY AND ARAB INTERESTS IN REGION ON ONE HAND AGAINST POSSIBLE CHARGES OF INTERFERENCE IN ETHIOPIA'S DOMESTIC AFFAIRS AND EVER-PRESENT AFRICAN CONCERN FOR MAINTAINING TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY, NO MATTER WHAT THE COST, ON THE OTHER. (RESIDENT NIGERIAN DIPLOMAT, DRAWING PARALLEL TO BIAFRA, STATED THAT HIS COUNTRY SUPPORT ETHIOPIAN POSITION ON ERITREA, I.E., THAT IT WAS INTERNAL CONFLICT TO BE SOLVED BY ETHIOPIANS WITHIN PRINCIPLE OF TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY. IT IS PROBABLY THAT THIS WILL BE INTERPRETATION OF MANY OAU MEMBER STATES.) OAU HAS NEVER RECOGNIZED ANY OF ERITREAN LIBERATION GROUPS, FURTHER WEAKENING ERITREAN CAUSE WITHIN AFRICAN CONTEXT. AT SAME TIME, HOWEVER, MANY OF SAME AFRICAN STATES CAN HARDLY BE AS COMPLACENT ABOUT LIKELIHOOD OF SOVIET-CUBAN MILITARY ROLE IN ERITREA, WHICH ROLE IS NOT DEFENSIBLE, AS THEY WERE ABOUT MILITARY ROLE IN OGADEN, WHICH WAS DEFENSIBLE ON TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY GROUNDS.

9. ERITREAN MILITARY SUCCESSES TO DATE HAVE LED MANY
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ASMARA RESIDENTS TO BELIEVE THAT SECESSIONISTS COULD CAPTURE CITY FROM ETHIOPIAN FORCES IF THEY "REALLY WANTED TO". AVAILABLE EVIDENCE CONTRADICTS THIS ASSUMPTION AND IN FACT INDICATES THAT MILITARY FORTUNES SHOULD BEGIN TO DECLINE FOR ERITREANS AND IMPROVE FOR ETHIOPIANS. RELIABLE ERITREANS SOURCE STATED ETHIOPIANS WERE ABLE TO RECAPTURE TOWN OF SALADRO (10KM SMEGB) MID-FEBRUARY.

WESTERN GARRISON OF BARENTU, ALTHOUGH CUT OFF BY ROAD FOR PAST YEAR AND ALLEGEDLY ENCIRCLED BY ELF, HAS NOT BEEN SERIOUSLY THREATENED. INITIAL ATTACKS ON MASSAWA HAVE BEEN REPULSED, REPORTEDLY AT GREAT LOSS TO BOTH SIDES, AND METHODICAL PLANNING IS SUPPOSEDLY UNDERWAY TO BREAK SIEGE OF TOWN WITH HELP OF ETHIOPIA'S UNCHALLENGED AIR SUPERIORITY. ASSAB HAS NOT EXPERIENCED ANY MAJOR ATTACKS, NOR DOES IT APPEAR THAT IT WILL. IN SUDAN BORDER AREA OF WESTERN ERITREAN TERRAIN IS SIMILAR TO SOME AREAS OF OGADEN AND QUITE SUITABLE FOR CONVENTIONAL WARFARE. INTERDICTING SECESSIONIST SUPPLY ROUTES FROM SUDAN MIGHT BE PRIORITY MILITARY OBJECTIVE, AS IT WAS LAST JUNE-JULY, UNTIL OGADEN WAR DIVERTED ETHIOPIAN ATTENTION. REPORTS BY RECENT RETURNEES FROM ERITREAN HAVE INDICATED SERIOUS DIFFERENCES PERSIST BETWEEN SECESSIONIST GROUPS IN FIELD, LEADING IN SOME CASES TO ARMED CLASHES. DESPITE EXPECTED INTENSIFICATION OF ETHIOPIAN CAMPAIGN AGAINST GUERRILLAS BEFORE LONG, ERITREANS SHOW NO SENSE OF URGENCY OR GREAT INCLINATION TO MOVE TOWARD UNIFICATION.

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10. COMPLEXITY OF COMPETING USG POLICY INTERESTS
RAISED BY ERITREAN PROBLEM AND EXPECTED SOVIET/CUBAN
INVOLVEMENT IN RESOLUTION OF PROBLEM, MAY BE YET
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ANOTHER SEVERE TEST OF US ABILITY TO RESIST CONFRONTATION WITH SOVIETS IN AFRICA, AND DESIRE NOT TO ALIENATE IMPORTANT AFRIVAN COUNTRIES AT EXPENSE OF OTHER US INTERESTS. WHILE USG HAS CONSIDERED IN PAST IDEA OF INFORMING ETHIOPIANS THAT WE MIGHT BE WILLING TO EXERT SOME PRESSURE ON ERITTREAN SUPPORTERS IN AREA WITH WHOM WE HAVE DEGREE OF INFLUENCE IN EXCHANGE FOR DECREASED SOVIET/CUBAN ROLE

IN ETHIOPIA, THAT NO LONGER APPEARS REALISTIC BECAUSE OF APPARENT ETHIOPIAN READINESS TO USE FOREIGN "ADVISORS" IN ERITREA. POSSIBILITY OF RAISING ERITREAN ISSUE AT UN BASED UPON PRECEDENT THAT IT WAS ONCE UN RESPONSIBILITY, MAY BE FRUITLESS ALSO IF STRONGLY OPOSED BY AFRICAN STATES. (AT TIME OF ESTABLISHMENT OF FEDERATION IN 1950-52 US STRONGLY SUPPORTED UN ACTIONS WHILE SOVIETS OPPOSED THEM.) ETHIOPIANS WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY ARGUE THAT NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTIONARY (NDR) PROGRAM AND MAY 1976 NINE-POINT ERITREAN PEACE POLICY PROVIDE FOR THEIR RESOLUTION OF PROBLEM AND REGIONAL AUTONOMY FOR ERITREANS WITHOUT UNASKED-FOR OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE FROM ANYONE.

11. EMBASSY RECOMMENDATIONS: US SHOULD CONTINUE TO SPEAK OUT FORCEFULLY AGAINST SUBSTANTIATED HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AGAINST CIVILIAN POPULATION IN THE FUTURE, BUT CAREFULLY DIFFERENTIATE THIS FROM MILITARY ACTIONS TAKEN AGAINST GUERRILLAS. US SHOULD ALSO CONTINUE TO BE CRITICAL OF FOREIGN TROOP INVOLVEMENT IN ERITREA WITH OBJECTIVE OF GAINING SOME AFRICAN SUPPORT AND POSSIBLE OAU CONDEMNATION OF EXTERNAL INVOLVEMENT IN INTERNAL ETHIOPIAN AFFAIR. CRITICAL PUBLIC STATEMENTS SHOULD BE BALANCED BY US SUPPORT FOR ETHIOPIA'S TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY. US SHOULD NOT GIVE APPEARANCE OF SECRET

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MILITARILY ASSISTING SECESSIONISTS NOR ENCOURAGE OUR FRIENDS TO DO SO EITHER. TO DO ANYTHING ELSE WOULD PLACE US IN SHARP CONTRAST WITH OUR PREVIOUS POLICY TOWARD ZAIRE"SHABA PROVINCE AND MIGHT WELL EXPOSE US TO CHARGES OF HYPOCRISY AND ONLY BEING CONCERNED ABOUT COLD WAR CONFRONTATION. FINALLY, US SHOULD CONTINUE TO ATTEMPT TO DEMONSTRATE PRIVATELY TO SOVIETS AND CUBANS THAT COSTS OF MAJOR INVOLVEMENT IN ERITREA MAY BE MORE THAN THEY ARE WILLING TO RISK.

12. EMBASSY WOULD WELCOME ADDRESSEE VIEWS ON ABOVE PROBLEMS AS SEEN FROM THEIR PERSPECTIVES.
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